

# Chapter 19

## Exploring the Lord's Propitiatory Food Mahaprasad: A Catalyst for Gastronomy Tourism Development in Jagannath Temple Region Puri, Odisha, India

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This research delves into the interplay of spirituality, gastronomy, and tourism through an investigation of the “Mahaprasad” tradition at Puri's Jagannath Temple, India. Originally a sacred food offering, “Mahaprasad” has evolved into a cultural and culinary attraction, influencing gastronomy tourism in this region. Employing a multidisciplinary approach blending cultural anthropology, culinary studies and tourism management, the study uses qualitative content analysis of scholarly articles, reports, and media information to explore Mahaprasad's role in regional identity and tourism. Findings highlight its ability to connect sacred traditions with culinary experiences, bolstering tourism around the temple. The research emphasizes Mahaprasad's cultural significance, socio-economic impact, and the motivations of pilgrims and tourists. It suggests leveraging cultural and culinary heritage for sustainable tourism, respecting the temple's spiritual sanctity while promoting local development.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Tourism in each region evolves by utilizing the inherent potential of natural, cultural, and human resources, which are thoughtfully packaged into tourist attractions that can offer memorable experiences for tourists. In this regard, the culinary heritage of “Mahaprasad,” a revered offering at the Jagannath Temple in Puri, Odisha, possesses significant potential to stimulate tourism growth in this region. Mahaprasad's distinctive culinary heritage presents an opportunity to attract global travellers, enriching their cultural experience and inviting them to explore the region through its unique gastronomic traditions. Puri, located in Odisha, India, is one of the four sacred “Char Dham” pilgrimage sites, attracting pilgrims from all over India and around the world who come here to seek the blessings of Lord Jagannath. In addition to its religious significance, Puri attracts a large influx of domestic and international tourists every year. Tourists flock to this place because of its rich historical landmarks, religious sanctuaries, stunning architecture, beautiful beaches, and vibrant cultural festivals (Bahadur, 2023). Furthermore, its inclusion in India's “National Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana Scheme” (HRIDAY) highlights its importance as a heritage city, emphasizing initiatives aimed at preserving its rich cultural and historical significance (Liu & Li, 2018) for future generations. Given this context, the culinary tradition of “Mahaprasad” can serve as a unique selling point (USP) for tourism development in the Jagannath Temple surrounding region. The sacred offering of “Mahaprasad” holds spiritual and cultural significance for the devotees, as it is believed to be blessed by Lord Jagannath himself.

The culinary tradition at the Jagannath Temple, Puri, known as “Ancient Hindu Temple Cuisine,” is revered as “The Glorious Sacred Offerings” (Sahoo, 2020). Believed to have persisted for thousands of years (Pattanaik, 2010), this tradition holds special significance due to the temple's inclusion in the “Chaar Dhaam” pilgrimage sites and its recognition as “Lord Vishnu's Dining Place,” distinguishing it from regular Prasad (Mishra, 1986). “Mahaprasad” is considered holier than typical prasad because it is believed to be prepared with the blessings of Goddess Mahalaxmi, the consort of Lord Jagannath (Nandy, 2015). The cooking practices involve clay pots and wood-fired stoves, adhering to traditional methods. Despite increased production, the hereditary chefs maintain the sacred act of cooking on a rotational basis, preserving this revered custom. The preparation and serving of Mahaprasad involve rigorous adherence to traditional methods and rituals, resulting in a unique culinary experience.

The “Mahaprasad” is not only a holy offering but also a culinary delight. “Mahaprasad” is locally referred to as “Maharda,” or sometimes as “Khatani.” In the temple's terminology, “Khatani” signifies fulfilling one's responsibilities. Indeed, it is aptly stated that:

“Mahaprasada ra swada sabutharu alaga” -

“The flavour of Mahaprasad is entirely distinct from any other meal you might consume.”

Promoting “Mahaprasad” as a culinary tourism product can attract food enthusiasts and cultural explorers interested in authentic local cuisine and traditional practices. Integrating “Mahaprasad” into tourism can offer tourists a holistic experience of spirituality, culture, and gastronomy. At the same time, it can bring substantial benefits to the local community of the temple surrounding the region by providing them with an opportunity to capitalize on their rich culinary heritage, thereby generating economic opportunities and enhancing their livelihoods. In addition, the promotion of “Mahaprasad” can play a pivotal role in preserving and showcasing traditional culinary arts and practices that might otherwise be overlooked. This mutually beneficial approach will create a sustainable model where tourists enjoy an immersive cultural experience while the local community thrives economically by preserving and sharing their heritage. In this way, “Mahaprasad” can become a symbol of cultural pride and economic vitality.

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